

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we pray in grateful thanks for the faith You have put in our hearts, for You have touched our lives and have chosen us to do Your will. We pray for those who have decided to rejected Your touch of grace, and ask that they may come to faith, for You never give up on them. We also pray for all those who have never heard about You; may they have 'Good News' preached to them! Hear our prayer, Lord Jesus; AMEN.

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Pray for the children and young people you know, and ask Jesus to touch their lives while they are young

On-going prayers

- **Pray for your neighbours** *The word neighbour means different things to different people, but please pray for those who live next door to you*
- *Pray for Christians in Jos, Nigeria, and the violence with Muslims*
- *Give thanks to God for the many miracles He performs all the time*

Meditation

When there is weeping in the heart and in the soul of humanity,
who will hear the cry?

When the earth cries out because of all the blood spilt in war,
who will hear the cry?

When a young girl is raped and mutilated for male satisfaction,
Who will hear the cry?

When hospital patients are treated like dirt because they are old,
Who will hear the cry?

When a child is sold into pornography and cannot call for help,
who will hear the cry?

When a woman is killed by her family for wanting to marry her lover,
Who will hear the cry?

Who will rise up in the face of all the world's injustice and say 'no more',
Who will counsel the sick, preach the Gospel and lobby governments,
Who will tend the distressed, show steadfast love and irresistible zeal
To confront our world with the moral standards of the God who made it?
Who will hear the cry?

Bible passage - Luke 4:1-13

¹ Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² where He was tempted by the devil for forty days. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were finished, he was famished.

³ The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' ⁴ But Jesus replied to him, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone."' "

⁵ Then the devil led Him up and showed Him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world, ⁶ and said to him, 'I will give You all this authority and their glory, because it has been handed over to me, and I can give it to whoever I wish.' ⁷ So if You worship me, it will all be Yours.' ⁸ Jesus replied to him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him."' "

⁹ Then the devil took Him to Jerusalem and placed Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here ¹⁰ for it is written, "He will brief His angels so that they protect You," ¹¹ and "They will lift you up in their hands, in case you strike your foot against a stone.'" ¹² Jesus replied to him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

¹³ When the devil had completed every test, he left Him until another time. ¹⁴ In the power of the Spirit, Jesus then returned to Galilee, and news about him spread throughout the surrounding country.

Bible Study

Review

The remarkable story of Jesus' temptations is well known, as are the details of devil's three attempts to test Jesus and divert Him from the ministry to which God had just ordained Him. In the Old Testament, a period of forty days and nights fasting was regarded as very holy, for Moses had spent forty days and nights on the top of Sinai (Ex 24:18, 34:28). It may be that Jesus expected to commune with His Father as He left the Jordan (4:1), but the devil is no respecter of past precedent, and he acted quickly to confront Jesus. Here was God incarnate, active in the very world the devil regarded as his own; a confrontation was unavoidable!

The temptations are recorded by Matthew (Matt 4:1-11), Mark (1:12,13) and Luke, and all of them place it after His baptism and before the first acts of His ministry. We must therefore think of Jesus' baptism and temptations as connected and essential to His preparation for ministry. Jesus came to complete God's plan of salvation and received the Holy Spirit to do just this, but it was essential that He should face the challenge of evil present in the world, personified in the devil.

Mark says the temptations took place but does not describe the details; he is content to record that Jesus began a battle with evil that continued until His death, and it is an important point. Luke's story is roughly the same as that of Matthew with these temptations, to turn stones into bread, to seize power over the world by right, and to appeal to the dramatic. This was the devil's attempt to make Jesus prove He was the Messiah by doing things that would destroy His ministry before it began!

If you were to read Luke's account alongside Matthew, you would be surprised to find that the incidents are not recorded in the same order; the first temptation (stone into bread) is the same in both, but the other two are different! Matthew finishes with Jesus' rejection of the devil's appeal to worship him and take the world for Himself. Luke's account finishes with Jesus refusal to jump off the Temple roof to meet popular expectation! In those days a well known story suggested that the Messiah would come and 'stand on the roof of the holy place' (Midrash Pesikta R36-162), and this explains the background to this temptation. The differences between Luke and Matthew reflect their individual approaches to telling the story of Jesus. Matthew emphasises the Kingly authority of Jesus, who dismissed the devil by refusing his request to worship him. Luke explained that Jesus would do God's work in God's way, and not be a puppet of people's demands. However, both stories are in each Gospel, and each is important. This is why the New Testament has more than one 'Gospel'!

There are many excellent discussion points in this passage, but one or two important matters demand our attention. Firstly, Luke emphasises the overall guidance and protection of the Holy Spirit. In verse 1, he says that Jesus went into the wilderness '*full of the Holy Spirit*', and his distinct use of the word 'full' gives us confidence that Jesus is ready for the battle ahead. At the end of the temptations, Luke says that Jesus returned home '*in the power of the Holy Spirit*', a detail left out in Matthew (and Mark), which confirms that Jesus was now ready for His ministry.

Secondly, both the devil and Jesus use Scripture in their argument. The devil used Scripture to tempt Jesus to feed people, just as God fed His people in the desert with 'manna' (Ex 16:31); but Jesus refuted the devil with reference to Deuteronomy (8:3 – see verse 4). Each of the other temptations is a battle of Scripture quote (as we will see later). However, Jesus was always willing to pursue the truth in Scripture, and not just accept, as many do today, that 'Scripture can mean anything'. Jesus won His battle by keeping close to the truth of God's Word and refusing to yield to the devil's authority (4:6); we can learn a great deal from His approach to Scripture

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- The temptation to turn loaves into bread (4:3,4)

- The temptation to take worldly authority for Himself (4:5-8)
- The temptation to do the popular and spectacular (4:9-12)

Notes on the text and translation

Significant phrases

V4 'Man shall not live by bread alone'

Other translations:

'One does not live by bread alone.' (NRSV)

The Greek word 'anthropos' means 'man' in the general sense of 'people'. However, the quote sounds odd with the word 'people' inserted here, and the NRSV has dealt with the problem by making it into a general statement '*One shall not live ...*' (above). In addition, this is a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3, where the word 'man' is used in Hebrew. I have therefore decided to keep the traditional rendering '*Man shall not live ...*'.

V5 'led Him up ...'

Other translations:

'led Him up to a high place ...' (NIV)

The text only has the words 'led Him up'. The NIV includes the words '*to a high place*' because the translators believed that this is what Luke meant, even if he did not say it. They believe this because Matthew, in his version of the story, says '*took Him to a very high mountain ...*' (Matt 4:8). I have preferred to follow the majority of translators and keep close to the original text as found in Luke.

V13 'he left Him until another time'

Other translations:

'he left him until an opportune time' (NIV)

'he departed from him until an opportune time.' (NRSV)

The Greek says, literally, '*he went away from Him until a time*'. Clearly, this phrase had a further meaning such as '*a suitable moment*', or '*an opportune time*'. I have preferred a more non-descript '*until another time*' because I feel that Luke is only making the most general and loose of statements. The Devil would indeed return, but we do not know when; so the text should not give any hint, and the word 'opportune' implies some motive in the devil's actions. The Greek says nothing about this, only that at the time, he left.

Problems with the ancient Greek/Hebrew text

V4 'Man shall not live by bread alone'

Some of the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament have additional Greek words here which translate as '*but from the Word of God*'. This would make the sentence similar to Matthew's version of this '*but by every word that comes from the mouth of God*' (which is the same as the Old Testament original of this text, as found in Deuteronomy 8:3). The oldest manuscript evidence suggests that Luke did in fact shorten the quote, as I have translated it here, but it is not at all clear why he did this!

Going Deeper

The temptation to turn loaves into bread (4:3,4)

Jesus' first trial was to turn stones into bread (4:33). This was not merely a temptation to feed people who were hungry in order either to help them or to gain their allegiance. Jesus did indeed perform miracles of this nature in His ministry, when He twice fed the crowds, the five thousand (Matt 14:15-21, Luke 9:10-17) and the four thousand (Matt 15:29-39, Mark 8:1-10). It is more likely that this temptation arose because of Jesus' own hunger, and by resisting the temptation, Jesus asserted His desire and ability to rely on His Father, and not on His own feelings. He was the Messiah, and His work was dependent primarily on the spiritual resources of the Father and not earthly resources, moreover, His ministry was about meeting the needs of others and not Himself, this is no small point. So in order to reject the devil, He quoted back to him the words of Moses when encouraging the people of God in the wilderness

'man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God's mouth' (Deut. 8:3).

It is also worth noting the devil's words to Jesus, *'if you are the Son of God, command this stone ...'* (4:3); in this way the devil placed a question mark in Jesus' mind about the truth and intent of God His Father. This is the same form of temptation used by Satan on Eve in the garden of Eden, for the snake said to her, *'did God really say ...'* (Gen 3:1). Consequently, we should be wary of inappropriate questioning, which seeks to displace or dishonour the authority of God. There is much questioning we can do in life without cutting across God's honest and loving intent to be faithful to His creation, and proper questioning lies at the heart of much human endeavour, including most learning. Nevertheless, we need to learn the difference between the natural asking of questions that stretches the human mind and the temptations of the devil that lead us astray from truth, love and our eternal destiny in God. Jesus learnt about this early in His ministry, and we should learn from Him.

The temptation to take worldly authority for Himself (4:5-8)

The second test is important, for here, the devil proudly shows Jesus what he regards as his own to give away; he shows Jesus the whole world (4:5), not from a high vantage point (as in Matthew's Gospel – see Matt 4:8), but in a vision of all the *'authority and glory'* (4:6) to be found in the world. The devil clearly states here that this is his to give away, and if we stop and think about this for a moment, it is an astonishing vision and an astounding claim. Today, we can picture this as the immense power of super-nations, the military, science and technology, even the internet itself and those companies that make billions out of it, let alone the authority of Presidents, Kings and Dictators across the world. It is as if the devil was offering Jesus the equivalent of all this, in respect of the world in His own day, the Roman Empire, then the most advanced civilisation of the world. But we must stop and consider what Scripture says, the devil has received this and it is his to *'give it to whoever I wish'*! Who will play to the devil's tune and receive such power? Not Jesus!

The whole devilish temptation is based on the false premise that Jesus might consider creating God's Kingdom by some kind of bargain with the devil. No, God had sent Jesus to claim the world through love and suffering not through arrogance and power; and in the end it was Jesus' to win and not the devil's to give away. Jesus angrily rejected the devil and rebuked him (4:10) with words of Moses that affirm belief in one God alone, and refuse to bow to idolatry.

'Worship the Lord your God, serve him only' (Deuteronomy 6:13)

In truth, God sent Jesus to claim all authority and all the Kingdoms of the world for His father, but he would not do this by succumbing to an imposter. He intended to fight the devil for it, not take it on his terms. Jesus' quote from Deuteronomy is also interesting because of the way it speaks about worship. This quote identifies worship not as some might do today, in terms of techniques, music, spiritual experience or even as certain forms of prayer. The use of the word *'worship'* here goes right to the heart of what this word means; it describes an attitude of heart towards God that is un-diverted and un-diluted, focussed on the Lord God and Him alone. Jesus' response to the devil indicates the importance of our concentration on the Lord God and on His purposes.

The temptation to do the popular and spectacular (4:9-12)

In this last temptation in Luke's Gospel, the devil takes Jesus to the 'pinnacle' or highest point on the new Temple compound in Jerusalem. Along with the clear connection with the popular myth of Jesus' day (see above), there are a number of common suggestions about what this means. Some think it is a temptation to identify with Herod's new Temple and claim the coming of God's 'Shekinah Glory' (abiding presence) within it. Others think it could be a temptation to create an artificial crisis by falling off the temple, and perform a dramatic yet selfish miracle by showing complete dependence upon the Scriptural promises of God (*'He will brief His angels so that they will protect you ...'* Psalm 91:11 – see 4:10).

Any or all of these are possible, and people may indeed have thought such things when they read about them in the early days of the church, however, none of them was God's way of establishing His Kingdom. We should remember that when Jesus did indeed go to the Temple towards the end of His ministry, He went in fulfilment of another scripture (Zech. 9:9), like a suffering servant rather than a miracle performer and crowd pleaser! Jesus knew full well that God had promised to keep His Messiah safe (as in these quotes from Psalm 91) and He rebuked the Devil again with the words of Moses *'do not put the Lord Your God to the test'* (Deut 6:16). These quotes confirm that Jesus will not question God's resources as the people of Israel did in the desert.

Application

These tests all expose an uncomfortable truth lying behind everything we know about our world, which is that the devil (Satan) has authority in this earth (see also 2 Cor 4:4, and John 12:31 and 16:1), and we cannot escape the moral implications of this fact. Sin is everywhere and when people are left to their own devices,

they succumb to evil and are capable of the most terrible cruelty towards each other. Paradoxically, terrible evils are often justified as being necessary because of self protection and love for one's own people and traditions. This is our world, and God wants us to escape from it and come into His Kingdom of pure love and peace; we can escape Satan's grip on the world through Jesus Christ, and submit to God's Kingdom and authority on earth, not Satan's.

Let there be no mistake; people generally do not like the idea that Jesus Christ is in the business of taking over the whole world to establish His Kingdom, and neither will He compromise with any other authority! The very thought contravenes the political correctness that asks most people today to accept the religious integrity of all people and their traditions. However, although it is of course right to be polite and loving towards all people because they are created by God, our message is to declare that the God who made the world is in the business of rooting out evil and claiming back this world for Himself.

On this journey of the defeat of the devil and the establishment of the Kingdom, our only guide is Jesus, who has walked within this world. Those who walk with Him discover that He is not a threat to those who will listen to Him and learn from Him, and there is no deception in His ways or insulting of those who do not yet know Him. The heart of God yearns for all to receive His love and know that true satisfaction is not gained through religion; it is found through the person of Jesus Christ who leads us to God. All religion is merely a projection of human hopes and fears, except that which points to the one true God who made all things and does not give up on what He has made.

Lastly, Jesus had to fight the devil to get rid of his authority in the world. He died on a Cross in the fiercest of spiritual battles to win our peace with our Maker. As a consequence, we who are His followers live at a time when we must both fight alongside Him to confront the evil still present in our world, but also live in the light of the victory He has won. Christ's defeat of the devil has struck the fatal blow but the enemy is not yet dead, and he is sometimes more truly depraved because of his wounds; yet God's people can worship their Lord with joy and thanksgiving because they know they have the victory! The battle engaged at Jesus' temptations signals the beginning of the defeat of all evil, and the promise of our salvation!

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How does the devil tempt people today, and does this have any similarity with the temptations faced by Jesus in this passage?
2. Discuss how Scripture may be used to stand against the devil, and whether this is a real experience for people in your group.
3. Do you think these events were indeed 'temptations' of Jesus. Is there any other word that describes them better, such as 'trials', or 'tests'.

Topics covered by this text

- *The power of the Holy Spirit*
- *The authority of the devil in the world*
- *The power of temptation*
- *The use of Scripture in spiritual warfare*

Personal comments by author

This is one of those passages where there seems to be an embarrassment of riches for anyone who writes. Almost every Christian has heard sermons and teaching about the temptations, and many theories have been put forward for each of them together with their meaning for this world. For this reason, it is vital that each one of us sit back and read this passage with a heart that is open for the leading of the Spirit. The Lord longs to lead us according to His purposes for us now, and there is much to discover. What I have written only stands at the door of this Scripture.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *I could suggest this for any passage of Scripture, but it is particularly relevant for this passage. After completing the study, please read it through several times and each time, make a few notes about what the Spirit puts on your mind. You will be surprised where he leads.*

- *Pray for this hurting world where the devil holds sway in so many ways and in so many places. Pray that God's people will be conscious of the spiritual battle of which they are a part, and pray that they be strengthened.*
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Final Prayer

Lord, I turn my eyes towards You, I look for Your help, I seek Your advice, and I long for Your presence in every moment of my life. Remove the unseen barriers, O Lord, and break into my consciousness with Your liberating power, I pray, and encourage me. Thank You, Lord: AMEN
